Digital and Blended Learning as a way to Improve Employment and Entrepreneur Outcomes
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Foreword

We are delighted to share this research report, how-to-guide and toolkit entitled “How to Design and Scale Digital and Blended Learning Programs to Improve Employment and Entrepreneurship Outcomes”.

The objectives of this research are to provide insights into:

• The efficacy of digital learning as a method for delivering Skills to Succeed outcomes

• How digital learning can be effectively leveraged in a scalable way to better achieve and measure Skills to Succeed outcomes.

It is our hope that this report and tools will be useful for practitioners working to upskill job seekers and entrepreneurs via digital learning – whether as a reference to design, implement and track impact of a new program or to validate or improve an existing program. In addition, we hope the report will provide nonprofit leaders and funders a strong case for adopting or investing in digital learning to improve employment outcomes.

We want to thank the more than 30 Skills to Succeed practitioners from Accenture and 20 not-for-profit delivery partners who co-created this content as part of a peer-to-peer Digital Learning network. Through surveys, interviews and roundtables discussions, the group reviewed research findings from over 70 sources and translated their experiences implementing digital learning programs into a set of design principles that can help others build and scale similar initiatives. The Digital Learning Circle pushed to make this work relevant and actionable by sharing what is working as well as what has proven challenging.

Thank you to the superb Accenture team, who conceived of and ran the Digital Learning Circle, conducted the research and wrote the final products: Samantha Fisher, Anna Roumiantsveva and Rosanne Williams.

Together with our strategic partners, we have equipped more than 800,000 people with workplace and entrepreneurial skills – more than triple the impact we set out to achieve when we first established our Skills to Succeed goal in 2010. We recognize that no single organization can single-handedly address the issues of employment and entrepreneurship. It takes collaboration across an ecosystem of nonprofit partners, government agencies, employers and other donors, to create meaningful work, lasting change and sustainable economic growth for millions of people worldwide. Having just set our goals for 2020 (see call out box below), we will continue to test ways of creating a global learning network of Skills to Succeed practitioners and to distill and disseminate shared insights that can help us collectively improve results for jobseekers and entrepreneurs. We encourage you to give us your feedback and help us shape the journey ahead together.

Jill Huntley
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Director
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Accenture
About Accenture Skills to Succeed

Having the right skills to open doors to meaningful, lasting employment or business ownership is critical. We launched Skills to Succeed in 2009 to address this need and to advance employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in markets around the world. By mobilizing our people, partners, clients and others, we strive to make a measurable and sustainable difference in the economic vitality and resilience of individuals, families and communities.

By the end of fiscal 2020, together with our strategic partners, we will pursue the following targets:

**Demand-led Skilling**
Equip more than three million people with the skills to get a job or build a business.

**Employment and Entrepreneurship Outcomes**
Increase our focus on the successful transition from skill-building programs to sustainable jobs and businesses and improve our collective ability to measure and report on these outcomes.

**Collaboration for Systemic Change**
Bring together organizations across sectors to create large-scale, lasting solutions aimed at closing global employment gaps.

The Skills to Succeed strategy includes leveraging technology to accelerate and expand impact. Relevant technologies will be leveraged across these areas:

- Performance management and data analytic tools, including tools to assess skill/capability requirements and industry demand
- Skilling via digital tools and content to create, share and deliver skilling content
- Mobile learning tools to expand the reach of programs
- Community building tools to facilitate sharing of knowledge between job seekers and entrepreneurs
Executive Summary

There is no shortage of new digital learning companies, initiatives and innovations that have emerged across the education and training industry in response to the impending digital disruption in education.

As in any period of innovation and disruption, some of these ventures have been successful, while others less so. The failures are often held up to fuel skepticism around the efficacy of digital learning as an education method. A variety of myths have therefore popped up around digital learning that this report seeks to debunk.

In all, this report finds that examples of less successful digital learning programs are more due to suboptimal design and implementation than to inherent problems with the digital learning method itself. It finds that digital learning is an inherently effective learning method to achieve Skills to Succeed outcomes. The question is not so much whether digital learning is effective, but rather how can a digital learning program be designed and implemented effectively.

To summarize and simplify the key conclusions of the research:

- Learners: There is a case for using digital and blended learning to impart the type of skills that workforce development programs generally aim to impart to the beneficiaries they generally aim to serve.
- Content Design: The design choices involving the mode, method, timing and customization of delivery often involve making trade-offs between cost/complexity and efficacy. They need to be designed with the needs of the particular set of beneficiaries and targeted program outcomes in mind.

### Myth | Truth | Caveat
--- | --- | ---
1. Learner outcomes are not as good with Digital learning | Planned learning outcomes are the same if not better with digital and online learning – as long as the content is effectively designed | Unplanned or "incidental" learning (e.g., social skills) outcomes are not as good with 100% online programs, but can still be realized through blended learning
2. There is no real cost savings by adopting Digital learning | Digital learning is less costly per beneficiary over time for 83% of cross-sector organizations | There needs to be a plan in place to pay back the relatively higher upfront investment
3. Digital learning is not effective when used with disadvantaged populations | Nearly all beneficiaries can be served by digital learning | Some are more immediately suited for digital learning while others require preparatory courses
4. Digital learning is not suitable to teach certain skills | No type of technical or employability skills are more or less suited to the digital medium than others | There needs to be alignment between the type of skill taught and the structure by which it is taught
5. The customization needed for Digital Learning to reach new areas (i.e., locations, types of beneficiaries, etc) prevents it from being scalable | Digital allows for the customization needed to adapt content to new cultures or languages in a scalable way that is not possible in purely classroom-based programs | Customization is a delicate balance of cost vs. applicability
6. It is too difficult for beneficiaries to use Digital Learning due lack of ICT availability | Digital Learning programs have been successfully designed for all stages of connectivity, overcoming existing hurdles to accessibility | Some are more immediately suited for digital learning while others require preparatory courses
7. Digital Learning puts the trainer's job at risk | Instructors can enjoy benefits of reduced instruction time and more coaching and advising time to improve the quality of the learning outcomes. Trainer capacity can also be redirected to help the program to scale with new course sections, or higher student throughput | This process of teaching trainers how to leverage online resources effectively for digital learning takes time. It is not successful to expect trainers to self-train on their own time
8. The trainer training for Digital Learning is not much different than for a classroom program | Transitioning to a new pedagogy as well as learning to leverage the digital medium effectively for teaching purposes requires significant training | Some organizations can additionally choose to validate learning for the program as a whole, not just the digital learning portion
9. There is no real way to validate if learning has taken place in Digital Learning | LMS capabilities can greatly facilitate the collection and management of learner skill-level data | This process of teaching trainers how to leverage online resources effectively for digital learning takes time. It is not successful to expect trainers to self-train on their own time
10. Digital Learning has no impact on the ability to track and serve alumni | Digital allows either refresh or new content to be provided to alumni at a minimal cost. The ability to access follow-up training is one of the most in-demand services by learning program alumni | Some organizations can additionally choose to validate learning for the program as a whole, not just the digital learning portion
Approach and Methodology

We aim to develop concrete and actionable advice, grounded in available secondary research, time-tested Accenture methodologies and the experience of digital learning implementers across the Skills to Succeed practitioner network.

The research was structured as an iterative learning endeavor to produce insights for the field in addition to providing a space for digital learning practitioners to learn and share from each other over the course of the six month project and beyond. The report and how-to-guide focus specifically on the areas of best practice in program design and operation that are unique to Digital and Blended Learning. The findings in the report are supported by:

- Digital Learning Circles: Two digital learning circles that brought together over 20 Skills to Succeed practitioners to conduct working sessions to refine, clarify and synthesize how to design and scale digital learning programs to improve employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. This also included interviews with the participants to talk about their experiences with digital learning.

- Skills to Succeed Practitioner Survey: A survey of over 30 Skills to Succeed practitioners who have implemented a pilot, full program, or both in digital and blended learning.

- Secondary Research from over 75 studies, papers and theories on the topic of digital and blended learning.

- Accenture Models, Tools and Assets: A sampling of Accenture's time-tested tools, including program management and value realization tools, have been modified to address the needs of digital learning programs.
Debunking the Myths

We summarize our insights into “Debunking the 10 Myths of Digital Learning” that often act as a barrier to adoption of digital learning programs in the workforce development space. The “truths” are supported by research linked to the remainder of the document.

How-to-Guide

The hallmarks of a successful workforce development program, digital or not, include a strong impact case, an effective and scalable design, smooth execution and continuous improvement. Many of these principles do not differ greatly in their handling for a digital learning program as compared to a classroom learning program. For the purpose of this guide, we focus primarily on areas that require unique treatment in the context of a digital learning program. The how-to-guide uses evidence to develop and present recommended steps to design, implement and run a strong digital learning program. As digital learning really sets itself apart particularly in the area of effective educational content design, this guide focuses a large percentage of its content on that topic. Below, please find the framework and topics described in this report and guide.

| How do each of these areas need to be handled differently with a digital learning program vs. a classroom program? |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Make the Case for Digital Learning | • Target Strategic Impact  
• Quantify and Present the Case |  |
| 2. Design Effective Educational Content | • Serve Beneficiary Groups  
• Inform Content with Market Demand  
• Use Digital to Train Different Skills  
• Determine Percent of Blend  
• Deliver Content Synchronously vs. Asynchronously  
• Customize vs. Industrialize | • Design Methods for Imparting Content  
• Overcome Barriers to Accessibility  
• Enable Trainers  
• Validate Learning  
• Motivate Learners  
• Develop Supportive Alumni |
| 3. Build a Scalable Operation | • Partner Across the Workforce Development Ecosystem  
• Design the Detailed Digital Learning Operating Model  
• Select Supporting Technology |  |
| 4. Execute the Program | • Design and Execute the Pilot  
• Roll Out the Full-scale Program |  |
| 5. Engage Stakeholders and Capture Value from Digital Learning | • Define, Understand, and Measure Program Performance  
• Manage Change |  |
| 6. Continuous Improvement | • Continuously Improve |  |
Definitions

Definition of “Digital Learning” in this Report

For the sake of brevity, we have used the term "digital learning" throughout this document to mean both e-learning and blended learning, unless otherwise specified.

- E-Learning or online learning is defined as a pedagogy whereby content is delivered exclusively through digital means and without a live teacher physically present.
- Blended Learning is a pedagogy that blends digital and live classroom components, typically with a minimum of 30% of student time being spent on digital components.
- Digital learning is not the same as digitally enabled classroom learning, which is the term for a live teacher delivering content to students in a classroom while leveraging digital tools.

Definition of “Trainer”

To be true to the quoted content of the research and case studies, we refer to the person(s) delivering educational content by using multiple terms, including, but not limited to, “instructor”, “trainer”, “teacher”, “adviser”, or “faculty”. For the purpose of this research, we assume their role in digital learning to be substantively equivalent, though we do acknowledge that the different titles can be very meaningful.

Definition of Skill Types

- Technical Skills: “Technical skills are specialized knowledge and abilities used to perform a specific task. Technical skills are not unique to the specific individuals performing the task, but are particular to their field of employment. Most professions have specific skills that need to be mastered if an individual wants to rise to the top of the field.” (Investopedia, LLC)
  - Technology
  - Digital
  - Industry
  - Functional.
- Employability Skills – skills that help individuals seek, obtain, retain and succeed in employment and life management. This category of skills is frequently referred to in the market as “Soft Skills”.
  - Work Readiness Skills – such as identifying skills and interests, setting career goals, writing a resume, searching for a job and contacting employers – help [job seekers] find and obtain employment
  - Performance Skills – such as working in a team, time management and accepting supervision respectfully – help [employees] meet the social and business requirements of the workplace and keep a job.
- [Foundational] Life Skills* – such as maintaining health and hygiene, problem-solving, conflict management... help [employees] manage their lives in a safe and healthy manner and balance work as part of a broader set of demands and opportunities.” (Goldin)

Definition of Skill Levels

Reflects the amount of training required to acquire the skill to sufficient level of proficiency. Conclusions in this report primarily concern digital learning as a means for training toward middle and high skill employment.

- High Skills – professional/technical and managerial skills, typically requiring a bachelor's degree or extensive training
- Middle Skills – require some significant post-secondary education or training, but less than a bachelor's degree
- Low Skills – require secondary education or less, typically in the service and agricultural sectors. (Holzer)

* The placement of [Foundational] Life Skills in the overall skills hierarchy presented here differs from that of the original source document.
There is no shortage of new digital learning companies, initiatives and innovations that have emerged across the education and training industry in response to the impending digital disruption in education.

As in any period of innovation and disruption, some of these ventures have been successful, while others less so. The failures are often held up to fuel skepticism around the efficacy of digital learning as an education method. A variety of myths have therefore popped up around digital learning that this report seeks to debunk.

This report finds that examples of less successful digital learning programs are more due to suboptimal design and implementation than to inherent problems with the digital learning method itself. This report finds that digital learning is an inherently effective learning method to achieve **Skills to Succeed** outcomes. The question is not so much whether digital learning is effective, but rather how can a digital learning program be designed and implemented effectively.

### Myth #1: Learner outcomes are not as good with digital learning

#### Truth

Planned learning outcomes have been shown to be the same if not better with digital and online learning. While Massive Open Online Courses have developed a poor reputation for high dropout rates that result does not inevitably carry over to blended workforce development programs. Organizations such as the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) have achieved remarkably low drop-out rates of less than five percent by carefully designing their incentives for completion of their digital learning programs. Additionally, digital learning can lead to 25%-60% improved content retention relative to traditional classroom learning (Evans, 2013).

#### Caveat

Critical to digital learning benefits is effectively designed content, such as adaptive, gamified, or social learning. Simply putting classroom content into an online medium is not sufficient to realize true gains from digital learning.

- **Adaptive learning benefits:** Adaptive learning leverages advanced technology to deliver personalized learning at scale. In a 2013 report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, integrating adaptive learning components into digital learning increased learner course pass rates by 18%. These same learning components were shown to reduce student course withdrawals by 47% (Waters, 2014).

- **Gamified learning benefits:** Gamified learning either turns the process of learning into a game (through badges, leaderboards, etc.) or leverages games as part of the actual learning process. A study by the University of Colorado Denver found that students who learned through gamified eLearning courses scored 14% higher than those who learned through the traditional classroom (Sitzmann, 2011). Another study by the Kauffman Foundation found that learning through games can improve retention by over 108% (Ballest, 2013).

- **Social learning benefits:** Social learning integrates a social element into the learning process either in an integrated way (e.g. through concurrent chats during live webinars) or indirectly (e.g. through social learning study groups). While social platforms can be leveraged in non-digital learning as well, they are especially key in building digital program engagement since they serve as the principal channel of interaction. Highly engaged students in digital programs are reportedly twice as likely to use social platforms as the general learner population (Dixson, 2010).

Online learning platforms also provide several elements of “incidental” learning in addition to the curricular learning, such as time management and self-discipline. However, certain “incidental” learning elements are generally acquired through in-person learning environments and have had little success in being replicated in purely online environments. Examples include development of interpersonal relationships and cultural awareness (Kerka, 2000; Wang, 2014). Adding an in-person component to a purely online program (creating a blended program) can help to maximize incidental learning benefits.
Myth #2: There is no real cost savings by adopting digital learning

Truth
Digital learning programs provide the opportunity to reduce the total cost per beneficiary over time. A recent study showed that by switching to digital learning corporations saved on average 50%-70% of their training costs (Gutierrez, 2012), and these savings are by no means restricted exclusively to the corporate sphere. A recent eLearning Guild™ member survey of 32K cross-sector organizations reported 83% of the organizations had been able to reduce costs to under $150/beneficiary thanks to digital learning – significantly less than the cost required to administer the equivalent programs in-person.

The key drivers behind these cost benefits are greatly reduced capital costs, reduced instructor costs (due to a greater student-to-teacher ratio possible with same quality) and content creation costs. This leads to greater program efficiency, effectiveness and productivity.

Caveat
It is critical to take into account the relatively higher initial investment required to launch a digital learning program when estimating payback time.

Myth #3: Digital learning is not effective when used with disadvantaged populations

Truth
Digital learning can be successful with a broad range of beneficiaries across ages, geographical regions, backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions.

Caveat
While all beneficiaries can be served by digital learning, they can broadly be divided into two groups: those immediately suited for digital learning and those who require preparatory courses.

- Immediately suited: Beneficiaries immediately suited to digital learning have certain capabilities, such as basic technology skills, reading/writing proficiency, ability to work independently, a motivation to learn or a willingness to ask for help.
- Preparatory course required: The lack of these capabilities does not indicate that it is impossible to serve the beneficiaries, but rather that they would be most successful if they received preparatory courses prior to partaking in digital learning. The cost and time required for preparatory courses needs to be built into the plan for organizations serving these groups.

Myth #4: Digital learning is not suitable to teach certain skills

Truth
Research findings do not point to any particular types of technical or employability skills being more or less suited to the digital medium than others.

Caveat
The key reason that many digital learning programs underperform appears to be a misalignment between the type of skills being taught and the program’s structure. As such, the principal question to ask when designing a digital learning program is not so much which type of skill but rather how each type of skill can be taught effectively digitally. There are two main program structure types to be considered as part of this design process (Adams, 2010): a “First Generation” Model more suited to technical skills and a “Second Generation” model more suited to employability skills.

The customization needed for digital learning to reach new areas (i.e., locations, types of beneficiaries, etc) prevents it from being scalable

Truth
Digital allows for the customization needed to adapt content to new cultures or languages in a scalable way that is not possible in purely classroom-based programs. Customization is a delicate balance of cost vs. applicability when it comes to digital learning.
Methods for customization, from least to most costly, include:

- **Customization of classroom component to best contextualize digital content**
  This approach allows programs to introduce an element of customization through the help of the classroom teacher, without any costly modification to the digital part of the program.

- **Curation of digital curriculum for each group or individual (which courses students should take in which order)**
  The organization has a database of possible courses and beneficiaries are assigned to the courses that are most relevant to them (in the order that is most appropriate for them) – none of the content of any of the courses is customized in any way; the only thing that is customized is the order in which the learner experiences it.

- **Customization of digital material content for different beneficiary groups**
  The content of the various courses is customized by beneficiary group or individual beneficiary. While the core essence does not generally change (the theory of what is being taught), the learning objects (the examples, videos, and readings associated) can vary widely based on beneficiary culture, experience, and skill level. While this model can often improve content relevance to learners, it is more costly to implement since it requires a much larger base of content to be developed and integrated into the program.

- **Customization of the entire platform**
  Learners are each exposed to materials from different content providers, through different LMSs, on different device types, with different assessment structures. This is the most radical customization option, which usually also makes it the most expensive and complicated to implement.

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**Myth #6: It is too difficult for beneficiaries to use digital learning due lack of ICT availability**

**Truth**

It has been proven possible to overcome and work around ICT hurdles in nearly every environment. Lack of access to the ICT needed for digital learning can be due to the general infrastructure situation in a given locality, or due to a particular beneficiary’s lack of access. An increasing number of digital learning programs are overcoming challenges of service cost and reliability to deliver impressive results. Digital learning programs have now been designed for all stages of connectivity – from learning on tablets in hyper-connected cities to mobile learning (mLearning) programs over feature phones in remote villages. The best technology for the program is the technology the beneficiaries have, know how to use, and can afford (Trucano, 2013). Some programs ambitiously try to implement new technologies, introducing added layers of complexity to the program. Various methods have been successfully employed to overcome existing hurdles to accessibility without requiring new technologies, such as:

- Establishing community centers with shared access
- Making content available offline and syncing the device when it comes back online
- Bypassing the broadband network in favor of cell phone network (feature phones).

**Caveat**

ICT barriers can present some of the most significant hurdles to setting up a digital learning program and require careful planning to work around the hurdles.

For more information click here

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**Myth #7: Digital learning puts the trainer’s job at risk**

**Truth**

Contrary to popular belief, digital learning represents an opportunity for the trainer. Instructors often need to spend less time per learner – a recent study found that eLearning typically requires from 40% to 60% less instructor time than the same material delivered in a traditional classroom setting (Evans, 2013). This can translate into several different benefits for instructors, including opportunity to shift focus from straight transferring of content to advising and coaching, helping to provide better quality learning and learning outcomes. Trainers can also shift their time and focus on helping the program scale (additional course sections, more student throughput, etc). While the earning potential and working hours of the instructor can remain unchanged, the program can benefit from a lower cost-per student.

For more information click here

For more information click here
Myth #8: The trainer training for digital learning is not much different than for a classroom program

**Truth**

Transitioning to a new pedagogy as well as learning to leverage the digital effectively for teaching purposes requires significant training. According to Michael Trucano, The World Bank’s senior ICT and education policy specialist, “If there is one clear lesson from the introduction of educational technologies in schools around the world, it is that teacher training is critical to the success of such initiatives. Outreach to teachers, through both regular technical and pedagogical support and on-going professional development, should be seen as cornerstones of any large ICT investment in schools.” (Trucano, 2010)

Teaching instructors how to leverage online resources effectively for digital learning takes time. Programs need to consider this as being part of employees’ normal work (not something done on their own time). Instructors who take additional training in their free time for further qualification should be acknowledged, encouraged and rewarded through accomplishment certificates (Friedrich, 2010).

![For more information click here](#)

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Myth #9: There is no real way to validate if learning has taken place in digital learning

**Truth**

The LMS capabilities that are often core to digital learning programs greatly facilitate the collection and management of learner skill-level data, giving the program a more holistic picture of each learner's capabilities at any given point in time. In order to track progress, programs can:

- Track course completion: While this does not prove that learning was absorbed, it does guarantee that it was consumed.
- Verify acquisition of skills post-training: Much like traditional classroom learning, digital learning can incorporate learner assessments to track the level of skill attained post-training. Digital learning in the form of adaptive programming, games, or other formats can also go a step further by measuring not only comprehension but also decision-making ability with the content. This is difficult to achieve through traditional quiz-type assessments. (Allen, Dirksen, Quinn, Thalheimer; 2014).
- Measure relative improvement in skills: In order to know incremental improvement in skill, a baseline must first be established. Research has found that this is a big missing piece for most digital learning programs, with 67% of interviewed program directors reporting that they do not measure the effectiveness of their net-based programs. (Strother, 2002).
- Provide certifications or badges: Organizations can provide badges for learners that are recognized in the employment marketplace.

![For more information click here](#)

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Caveat

Some organizations choose to validate learning for the program as a whole in lieu of measuring the digital learning effectiveness alone. While there is value in measuring these program outcomes, understanding the impact and improvement areas of digital learning remains important.

![For more information click here](#)

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Myth #10: Digital learning has no impact on the ability to track and serve alumni

**Truth**

The ability to access additional follow-up training is one of the most in-demand services by learning program alumni – whether it is to refresh the knowledge they gained during the program or learn additional skills that they came to need after graduation. With the digital medium, they are able to access this content as needed at minimal cost to the organization (Carrington Crisp Limited, 2014). This follow-up training access for alumni is a best practice cited in the E-Learning Manifesto (Allen, Dirksen, Quinn, Thalheimer; 2014). Continued support to alumni has an impact on willingness of alumni to contribute to the program later on, through direct giving, mentoring, or as connections to employers.

![For more information click here](#)
Section 1: Make the Case for Digital Learning in Your Organization

Target Strategic Impact

Digital learning is most successful if it is clearly communicated as an aligned and committed part of an organization’s long term strategy. Organizations successfully incorporate digital learning into their strategy in different ways depending on their mandate and mission.

- Make a long-term commitment to Digital Learning
- Ensure digital learning is aligned your strategy and communicate the strategy
  - Complement and improve existing program offering
  - Drive growth and scale
  - Differentiate the organization
  - Define the organization
- Identify the value drivers of introducing digital learning to the organization
- Consolidate these findings into a business case to project net impact for the organization
- Examine potential risks
- Create an outline for the business case summary
- Review the purpose of the business case
- Analyze the audience
- Develop the story line
- Present figures in a compelling way
- Create the summary report
Digital learning can be successful with a broad range of beneficiaries across ages, geographical regions, backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions, though some beneficiaries are immediately suited to digital learning, while others require preparation. Segmenting learners accordingly can help define the digital learning program structure best suited to each group.

**Serve Beneficiary Groups**
- Determine if your beneficiaries are immediately suited for digital learning
- Prepare those beneficiaries not immediately suited for digital learning (offline or online approach)
- Match the digital learning program structure to beneficiary needs based on their learner segment

**Inform Content with Market Demand**
- Conduct secondary research to identify areas of demand
- Identify stakeholders to consult, including industry groups, employers, schools, charities, etc.
- Understand what jobs have a demand for trained beneficiaries
- Identify skills and competencies needed to be hired for the in-demand jobs
- Identify how employers can be involved with connecting students to real-world experiences
- Determine which skills and competencies should be delivered digitally

**Use Digital to Train Different Skills**
- Select the program structure that is best aligned to the type of skills you are teaching digitally

**Determine % of Blend**
- Examine your beneficiaries' learner profiles to determine the optimal blend of online delivery
- Match the beneficiary needs in terms of online vs. offline delivery mix with the program’s cost considerations
- Analyze the impact of incidental learning

**Asynchronous vs. Synchronous**
- Align delivery timing with program structure, skills being taught, and beneficiary needs
- Put in place an appropriate support structure to guide learners through the course
Section 3: Build a Scalable Operation

Partner across the Workforce Development Ecosystem for Digital Learning

Successful digital learning programs require collaboration across a diverse set of potential partners, each of whom brings certain capabilities to help the programs scale. These include: private companies, governmental organizations, educational institutions and nonprofit delivery organizations.

- Establish a collaboration with the private sector
- Consider partnering with established educational institutions
- Engage the public sector to help the program
- Identify a network of delivery partner organizations

Design Digital Learning Operating Model

- Structural
  - Organization Structure: Adjust to accommodate digital learning
  - Localization: Shift focus away from physical location
- Execution
  - People: Enable skill sharing among stakeholders
  - Processes and Tools: Enable sharing among stakeholders
  - Organization Design: Design and governance for a digital learning program

Select Supporting Technology

- Develop Learning Management System (LMS) requirements & evaluate current technologies in use
- Evaluate technology options in light of requirements
- Make a selection and socialize it to get buy-in across the organization
- Integrate the selection into the digital learning program implementation roll-out plan
Section 4: Execute the Program

Design and Execute the Pilot

While pilots for all programs are critical to ultimate success, digital learning pilots need to take special care to ensure instructors are sufficiently trained to deliver digital learning and need to account for the longer time-to-impact when designing pilot success metrics.
Managing any program and monitoring its progress from day one is key to realizing the projected program impact. Data held within digital learning programs often makes it easier to track metrics and identify issues.

- **Understand and Measure Performance**
  - Leverage tools to oversee alignment across projects and ensure adherence to work plans and budget
  - Realize value against the business case

- **Manage Change and Stakeholders**
  - Set up the organization for operational success under the new digital learning model
  - Build buy-in and monitor the transition closely
Section 6: Continuous Improvement for Digital Learning Programs

Steps to Achieve

Launching a successful digital program is not sufficient to ensure its continued success. Like with most programs, digital and otherwise, it must be constantly evaluated to understand what's working and what's not.

1. Make the Case for Digital Learning
2. Design Effective Educational Content
3. Build a Scalable Operation
4. Execute the Program
5. Engage Stakeholders and Capture Value from Digital Learning
6. Continuously Improve

- Gather feedback
- Integrate feedback into the program
As evident from our research and insights, digital learning is an effective and strategic enabler to scaling Skills to Succeed employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. It is not a matter of ‘if’ digital learning is used, but rather ‘when and at what pace’. Yet, the path from business case to implementation can be complex, and the considerations and decisions at each step are numerous.

Our Skills to Succeed Digital Learning Circle members share some key takeaways to support digital learning programs:

- Treat digital learning programs as strategic initiatives
- Focus on the long term, even if starting small
- Identify a strategy for metrics and reporting results from the start
- Lead with the beneficiary at the center of the program design, and the right design solution will follow
- Be open to an iterative design process – don’t wait for perfection
- Explore creative solutions, including reusing existing online curricula where relevant and leveraging the many low cost tools available
- Partnering can be a really effective way to drive scale, so take advantage of opportunities to build a network – with employers, with public sector and/or with educational institutions. There are many ways to build a collaborative solution.

While this report and how-to guide are the result of a comprehensive and collaborative research project, there is ample opportunity to continue to explore models for adopting and scaling digital learning. It is our hope that through the continued collaboration of the Skills to Succeed Digital Learning Circle we will define and test approaches that will improve our collective performance for job seekers and entrepreneurs. This report and how-to guide are living documents. As we continue to learn, collaborate and innovate around digital learning, we will update this collection of assets.

Whether you are in the investigative stage of digital learning as an enabler of your organization’s goals, in the midst of a digital learning implementation program, or are focused on scaling digital learning programs you’ve already implemented, we look forward to receiving your feedback on the relevance of these materials – both what works and what can be improved. Please contact us at CorporateCitizenship@accenture.com with any comments.

Video Transcript: Digital Learning Circles


Islas, J. (2013). Digital Literacy and Academic Success in Online Education for Underprivileged Communities: The Prep@Net Case. The University of Texas at Austin. <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/...


About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 336,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.

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